

## Good Question Asking

**MARK 4:9** Then Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'My name is Legion; for we are many.'

**MARK 8:22-30** They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. **23**He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, 'Can you see anything?' **24**And the man looked up and said, 'I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.' **25**Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. **26**Then he sent him away to his home, saying, 'Do not even go into the village.' [...] **27** Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' **28**And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' **29**He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah.' **30**And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

**MARK 9:14-29** When they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. **15**When the whole crowd saw him, they were immediately overcome with awe, and they ran forward to greet him. **16**He asked them, 'What are you arguing about with them?' **17**Someone from the crowd answered him, 'Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; **18**and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so.' **19**He answered them, 'You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me.' **20**And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it threw the boy into convulsions, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. **21**Jesus asked the father, 'How long has this been happening to him?' And he said, 'From childhood. **22**It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.' **23**Jesus said to him, 'If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes.' **24**Immediately the father of the child cried out, 'I believe; help my unbelief!' **25**When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, 'You spirit that keep this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!' **26**After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, 'He is dead.' **27**But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand. **28**When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, 'Why could we not cast it out?' **29**He said to them, 'This kind can come out only through prayer.' many.'

**MARK 10:35-37** James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.' **36**And he said to them, 'What is it you want me to do for you?' **37**And they said to him, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.'

**MARK 10:51** Then Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'My teacher, let me see again.'



What do you notice about the questions Jesus asks?

Leadership involves two-way communication. In talking with people, the way we use words is critical. We can encourage or discourage people, open them up or close them to us; we can motivate and inspire or dampen enthusiasm and engender doubts.

We want to learn to ask questions that will treat people like their thoughts and feelings are important. When we ask questions that are open-ended, we hear more from them and learn more about them than if we ask specific questions looking for specific answers.

BAD QUESTIONS	GOOD QUESTIONS
Yes/No: Could, would, should, do, did, will, can	What, where, when, who, how
Closed-ended	Open-ended
General	Directed toward specific categories of information
Content-oriented	Process-oriented
Leading	Stimulates thinking
Threatening	Non-threatening
Why are you ...?	What are the reasons you are...?

## Case Studies

<b>PRESENTING ISSUE</b>	Friend desires your approval for their decision to drop the commitment they've made to your team	Friend desires your approval for their decision to move out of their apartment, leaving roommates behind
<b>WHAT CONCERNS DO YOU HAVE?</b>	You fear that their decision is based in self-protection and risk avoidance rather than in wisdom	You know her roommates have made different lifestyle choices which are hard for your friend. Her conflict-avoidance and harboring resentments have increased the tension
<b>BAD QUESTIONS YOU'D BE TEMPTED TO ASK</b>	How do you think the others will feel, being dropped like this? How do you think I feel?  What could possibly be a higher priority than serving in this way?	Do you have a string of broken relationships and unreconciled friendships behind you?  Is this your usual way of dealing with relational tension?
<b>OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS THAT WOULD ACTUALLY HELP</b>	What are the commitments in your week you most enjoy? What is satisfying about them?  What priorities make this choice look attractive? What would be sacrificed?  How could these tradeoffs be avoided?	How have your conversations gone regarding your hopes to move out?  What are the tension points in your relationships? How do you contribute?  What could you do to address these tensions? How might God be at work?

**PRACTICE NOW:** Take some time in pairs to work on asking good questions. One of you present an dilemma or issue about which you are seeking clarity, perhaps a decision you are really facing. Or else you could talk about a recent event regarding which you still have some unprocessed feelings (positive or negative). The other will be simply trying to draw out the one speaking, by asking good questions and trying to help the one gain clarity, perspective, or peace. Take five minutes (or so) then switch roles.

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What do you notice about the questions Jesus asks?

- Jesus asks questions to help him understand what he is dealing with.
- He asks questions that lead people into greater faith.
- He asks rhetorical questions meant to get his disciples to think and learn: he wants to make them think
- He asks people to express what they want from Jesus—he doesn't assume he knows
- He honors people by listening to their requests and their answers to his questions

**Leaders' notes:** In the gospels, Jesus often asks "bad questions": rhetorical questions that he knows the answer to, questions that make people think but not to elicit information (for example, "How long must I be with you?"). But when Jesus is not teaching, he can be very pastoral and ask open-ended, good questions. Don't be caught up in all the examples of "bad questions" in scripture—we aren't saying that there is no place for these kinds of questions, but that they aren't the kind of questions designed to help a friend or to listen well to someone who is struggling.

Leadership involves two-way communication. In talking with people, the way we use words is critical. We can encourage or discourage people, open them up or close them to us; we can motivate and inspire or dampen enthusiasm and engender doubts. *Of course, this is a leadership skill, but really this is simply a friendship skill. We want to be the kind of friends that know how to draw out the thoughts and feelings of our friends well. We want to love people by listening well to them.*

We want to learn to ask questions that will treat people like their thoughts and feelings are important. When we ask questions that are open-ended, we hear more from them and learn more about them than if we ask specific questions looking for specific answers. *Consider the difference between "What did you enjoy about your day?" and "Did you have a good day?" The first question is more open-ended, and is likely to get more response than the one word "yes" of the second question.*

We can get pumped up to ask people questions and then get trapped in a form of questioning that produces defensiveness on the part of the responder, simply because we ask questions of them the way a lawyer asks questions while cross-examining a witness. Lawyers, with a witness on the stand, know they are never to ask a question to which they don't know the answer. The point, in a cross-examination, is not to discover the truth, but to highlight the points of information that make the truth sound like what the lawyer wants it to sound like. That is, in fact, the lawyer's job. But that is not our job, when we are trying to listen well to our students and friends. So we need a different approach, one that doesn't make people defensive (for they have nothing to defend), one that makes them the expert, the one with the real information regarding the best way to make the decision. So we ask questions of the following type:

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